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Ensuring meaningful lifelong learning opportunities for groups at risk

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Propositions belonging to the PhD thesis

Ensuring meaningful lifelong learning opportunities for groups at risk

by Josje van der Linden

1. While Sustainable Development Goal 4 (September 2015) speaks of ‘ensuring’ education, it only ‘promotes’ lifelong learning. This noncommittal formulation may turn the goal into mere lip service to the cause of lifelong learning, especially concerning the inclusion of meaningful learning for ‘groups at risk’.
2. As learning only turns meaningful for learners in a certain context, lifelong learning opportunities should rely on the contexts of the learners involved, be it primary school children in the Netherlands, literacy learners in Mozambique, vocational trainees in South Sudan or university students in Sudan or others.
3. Describing ‘groups at risk’ is a risky undertaking as it may lead to characterising people as non-achievers, victimised by their situation rather than as survivors, in charge of their own lives. The agency of these people – indeed, of all people – provides a better starting point for developing meaningful lifelong learning opportunities.
4. The pressure caused by the current obligation to continue learning across the lifespan will be mitigated, when learning opportunities are built on the agency of the learners in terms of both content and organisation.
5. Lifelong learning professionals need lifelong learning opportunities themselves. These will be meaningful to them if organised in professional learning communities as open networks in which practitioners, researchers, educators and students cooperate to develop practice-oriented knowledge.
6. Studying lifelong learning practices in different contexts, confronting data from various realities, discussing analysis and interpretations with researchers and practitioners from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, leads to collective learning and validation of research results.
7. Internationalisation of (higher) education and research entails more than just adding the word ‘international’ to teaching and research subjects and to expected learning and research outcomes; genuine internationalisation involves breaching existing power relations to produce knowledge collectively.
8. 10 years of conducting PhD research besides maintaining two teaching jobs resulted in piles of paper throwing long shadows over the writing desk; this calls for a thorough clean-up allowing new light to enter the workplace.